Centre for
Citizenship and
Democracy
University of Leuven

The Effect of Alienation and Indifference toward the Party System on Voter Turnout. A Comparative Analysis

Eva Falk Pedersen, Ruth Dassonneville & Marc Hooghe

eva.falkpedersen@soc.kuleuven.be - ruth.dassonneville@soc.kuleuven.be - marc.hooghe@soc.kuleuven.be

Paper presented at the

13th Belgian-Dutch Political Science Conference

Maastricht, 12-13 June 2014

Abstract

Voter turnout is not just dependent on individual characteristics of voters, but also on evaluations of the party system. It has been argued that both indifference and alienation can have a negative impact on the tendency to vote. While indifference means that the voter perceives little or no differences between the options that are available within the party system, alienation means that the voter has a negative evaluation of all political parties. In this paper we suggest that it is essential to take multiple parties into account when operationalizing indifference in a multiparty setting. The analysis shows that measures that move beyond looking at the top two parties are indeed superior in predicting voter turnout in multiparty systems, compared to cruder measurements. An analysis of CSES (Comparative Study of Electoral Systems) data shows that alienation has a stronger impact on voter turnout than indifference. We conclude with some observation on how a negative evaluation of the party system can contribute to a trend of declining voter turnout.

Keywords: voter turnout, party evaluations, CSES, indifference, alienation

1. Introduction

The decline of turnout levels worldwide and the implications of this decline for the functioning of democracy have stimulated scholars to investigate the factors causing citizens to abstain from voting. A rich literature indicates that socio-demographic and psychological factors such as age, education, political interest or a sense of civic duty are significantly related to voter turnout (Blais, Gidengil, & Nevitte, 2004; Blais, 2000; Franklin, 2004; Leighley & Nagler, 2012; Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980). Furthermore, it is by now well established that the political context is of crucial importance to understand whether or not citizens turn out to vote. Citizens do not act in a vacuum, the choice between turning out to vote or abstaining is also determined by the parties at offer, the closeness of the elections or salient campaign issues (Adams, Dow, & Merrill, 2006; Brody & Page, 1973; Plane & Gershtenson, 2004; Zipp, 1985).

The literature focusing on how the choice set of political parties affects citizens' likelihood to turn out to vote, is based on a distinction between indifference and alienation. First, indifference implies that citizens do not have a clear preference for a specific party, in contrast to other parties. Alienation, on the other hand, refers to a negative evaluation of all political parties competing in the election (Brody & Page, 1973). Previous research on the impact of these evaluations on turnout does indicate that both indifference and alienation significantly affect the probability that a voter will turn out to vote on Election Day. Most of these studies, however, were conducted in the context of the United States. This focus on one specific electoral context also implies a one-sided way of conceptualizing and investigating how indifference and alienation affect turnout. Especially with regard to attitudes that reflect how voters perceive the party system it is essential to take into account contextual-level variation.

The decline in turnout levels and the challenges this poses to democracy are obviously not limited to the United States, as the decline of turnout levels is also observed in numerous other political systems (Franklin, 2004; Hooghe, 2014). For this reason, it is essential to investigate the dynamics of indifference and alienation in a wider set of democracies. Implementing these concepts in a variety of political settings where the number of parties varies strongly, we take into account multiple parties in our operationalization of indifference and alienation.

This paper proceeds as follows. We start by reviewing the literature on the relation between preferences and turnout, with a special focus on indifference and alienation. Next, we address how scholars have previously measured preferences and what the shortcomings of these approaches are for a comparative analysis. We then present our approach and methodology and introduce the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES), which provides the data to test our hypotheses. After presenting the results from our analyses we end with some concluding remarks on our findings and implications for further research.

2. Indifference and alienation

Previous research has shown that in order to understand why some citizens turn out to vote and others abstain, the political context is important. A number of scholars claim that the choice set of candidates or parties available to voters strongly affects whether they will turn out to vote. Both feelings of indifference and feelings of alienation have been argued to significantly affect electoral participation.

Indifference refers to a perception of little or no significant differences between parties. As a consequence, which party wins does not matter for a voter and the benefit of voting for any of those parties is equal. From a rational voting perspective, then, these equal benefits should lead a citizen to abstain from voting (Downs, 1957). The authors of *the American Voter* expect that a voter *"fails to vote because he does not have a clear preference between partisan objects"* (Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960: 97). On these grounds, it can be expected that if a citizen does not have a clear preference for a specific party, s/he is less likely to go out and vote. Alienation, on the other hand, concerns the level at which citizens evaluate candidates or parties. As Brody and Page (1973) have pointed out, alienation captures the extent to which a citizen feels negative about the entire choice set. The link with turnout is straightforward, if a voter thinks none of the parties or candidates at offer is sufficiently attractive, this voter will not turn out to vote (Callander & Wilson, 2007).

Besides theoretical accounts on how indifference and alienation fit within a rational choice framework, there are also a number of empirical studies investigating the impact of indifference

and alienation on turnout. Brody and Page (1973) and Zipp (1985) have convincingly shown that in the context of US presidential elections, both indifference and alienation decrease the likelihood that citizens turn out to vote. There seems to be a renewed interest among political scientists in how indifference and alienation affect turnout, as is clear from a number of recent publications. The geographical focus of these studies is still mostly confined to the United States (Adams et al., 2006; Callander & Wilson, 2007; Leighley & Nagler, 2012; Plane & Gershtenson, 2004; Yoo, 2010). These studies, focusing either on both indifference and alienation or on one of the concepts only, unequivocally indicate that indifference and alienation decrease the probability that a citizen turns out to vote.

A number of scholars have implemented the concepts of indifference and alienation in other electoral contexts as well. Johnston, Matthews and Bittner (2007), for example, find a relation between indifference and alienation, and turnout in Canada. Indeed, they find that *" [a]n increase in either produces a decrease in turnout, with the largest effect of the two emanating from alienation."* (Johnston et al., 2007 : 740). Aarts and Wessels (2005) find similar results for a set of European countries. Focusing on operationalizations of indifference only, Melton (2013) furthermore makes use of CSES-data to investigate the validity of three different indifference measures.

The first theoretical accounts and empirical analyses of indifference and alienation originate in the context of the United States. Consequently, theoretical accounts and empirical operationalizations are largely influenced by the U.S. political system (e.g., the focus on candidates, on a one-dimensional ideological space or on the bipartisan system). Substantively, however, choice options available to voters should affect turnout in any democracy. In no single setting do citizens *"make political decisions in a vacuum"* (Aarts & Wessels, 2005: 74). The few studies that have investigated indifference and alienation in other than the U.S. context do indeed provide evidence for the travelling capacity of both concepts and their effects on vote. For this reason, we hypothesize that for the set of democracies covered by the CSES-project as well both indifference and alienation will decrease the likelihood that a citizen turns out to vote.

H1: The more indifferent a voter is toward political parties, the less likely s/he is to turn out to vote.

H2: The more alienated a voter is from the party system, the less likely s/he is to turn out to vote.

3. A comparative perspective on indifference and alienation

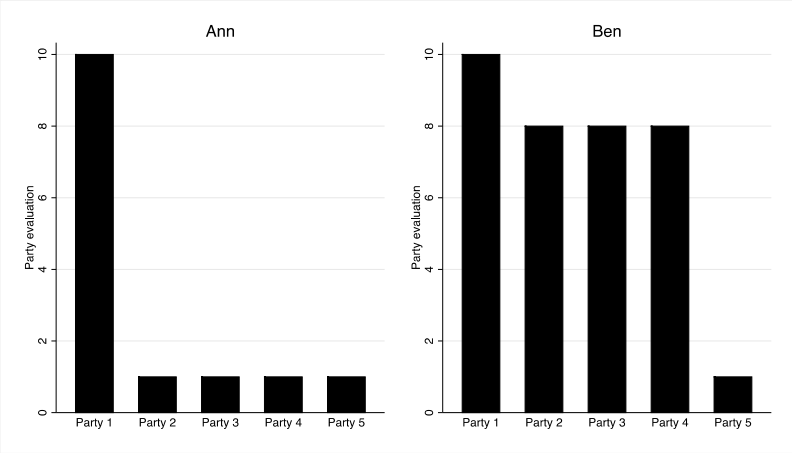
A number of scholars have investigated indifference and alienation from a spatial modeling perspective. For operationalizing both concepts, these authors look at the ideological position of a voter within a party space. An alienated voter is then a voter who is ideologically close to none of the parties, while an indifferent voter is positioned at an equal distance of multiple parties (Adams et al., 2006; Plane & Gershtenson, 2004; Thurner & Eymann, 2000; Zipp, 1985). Unfortunately, such an approach is not suited for a cross-national analysis of indifference and alienation. While some electoral arenas are characterized by one dominant ideological dimension, previous research has indicated that multiple dimensions are at play in other settings (Bertoa, 2014). Furthermore, some authors claim that new dimensions are arising and affecting the behavior of voters and parties (Kriesi, 2010; Kriesi et al., 2006). This variety of ideological constellations across countries and their dynamical nature, therefore, make it impossible to develop a valid cross-national spatial analysis of indifference and alienation within these conditions.

An alternative approach that has occasionally been used to investigate indifference and alienation looks at party evaluations. Alienated voters are voters who evaluate none of the parties positively, while indifferent voters evaluate multiple parties equally (Aarts & Wessels, 2005; Brody & Page, 1973; Johnston et al., 2007). Such an approach to operationalize indifference and alienation has a higher travelling capacity and can easily be applied in different electoral contexts. These measures come with the additional advantage of not limiting voters' preferences of parties to ideological considerations. Research has shown that vote choices and party preferences are determined not only by ideology but also by the socio-structural characteristics of voters, economic perceptions or attitudes towards candidates (Franklin, Mackie, & Valen, 2009; Miller & Shanks, 1996). As a consequence, party evaluations could be considered a broad summary measure of different factors, including ideological attitudes as well.

A number of studies have already investigated indifference comparatively by looking at measures of party preference (Aarts & Wessels, 2005; Melton, 2013). A question that has not been addressed yet, however, is how indifference should be looked at if there is variation in the number of parties at offer. Brody and Page (1973: 4) defined indifference as *"the maximum amount of difference between the evaluation of any two candidates"*, implying that only the most and the least preferred candidate are taken into account. This is also the operationalization used by Johnston et al. (2007) in their analysis of indifference in Canada. Aarts and Wessels (2005) take a different approach and define a voter as indifferent when she gives her highest party rating to more than one party. Doing so, they in essence only take into consideration the party evaluations of the two most preferred parties. If the two top scores are equal, a voter is indifferent, if not, then a voter is not indifferent. Kroh, van der Brug and van der Eijk (2007) as well only take into account the two most preferred parties when calculating indifference. They simply calculate the difference between the ratings for the most and the second most preferred party. With multiple parties at offer, however, both approaches can mask important differences in how citizens evaluate the parties.

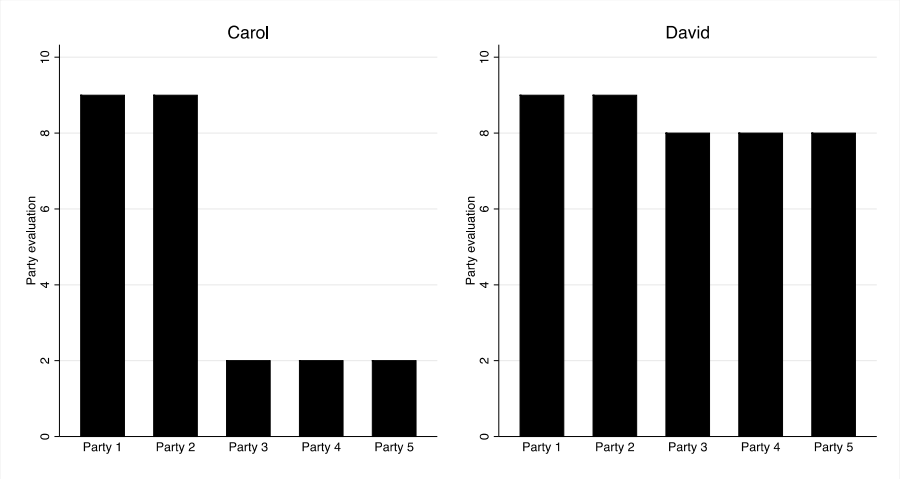
In Figure 1 we illustrate how the operationalization of Brody and Page (1973), that looks at the most and least preferred party only, can be misleading. We do so by graphically presenting the party preferences of two hypothetical voters. Ann likes Party 1 most and gives that party the maximum rating of 10. To the other four parties, she gives a rating of 1, which results in an indifference score of 10-1=9. Ben also gives the maximum rating of 10 to his most preferred party and he as well has a minimum rating of 1. As a consequence, the indifference-score for Ben –using the Brody and Page operationalization– is equal to Ann's indifference score. Ann evaluates parties 2 to 4 much more negative than Ben does, however, and comparing both voters it does seem logical to consider Ben a more indifferent voter than Ann. This difference between both voters is not taken into account in the Brody and Page indifference measure.

Figure 1. Party preferences for hypothetical voters – example 1



By means of a second example (see Figure 2), we illustrate that only taking into account the top-two party ratings to construct a measure of indifference implies a loss of information as well. Using the approach of Aarts and Wessels (2005), both Carol and David would be defined as indifferent because both give their maximum rating to two parties. The Kroh et al. (2007) approach as well would lead to evaluating Carol and David as equally indifferent, because for both voters the difference between the most and the second most preferred party is 0. Looking at how Carol and David evaluate the other parties, however, it is clear that David is more indifferent than Carol is. While David rates all five parties about equally, Carol has a clear preference for two parties over the other options available

Figure 2. Party preferences for hypothetical voters – example 2



The examples illustrate that operationalizing indifference by looking at two parties only –either being the most and the second most preferred or the most and the least preferred party– implies a substantial loss of information. Both approaches can mask important differences in degrees of indifference when a voter has more than two parties to evaluate. For this reason, in this paper we hypothesize that a more fruitful approach when investigating indifference in a variety of political systems –with quite often more than two parties at offer– is to take into account differences in voters' evaluations of all parties. In this study, we will therefore use both the traditional measures of indifference, and a more encompassing measure that includes information on all political parties at offer.

4. Control variables

Self-evidently, we cannot assess how indifference and alienation affect voter turnout without taking into account other variables that scholars have repeatedly found to determine whether or not a citizen abstains from voting. First, there is a set of psychological explanations of why one votes. A person who is interested in politics is more likely to vote (Blais, 2000; Dalton, 2007). When one is disposed to politics, or interested, political knowledge is also usually higher. This is why knowledge as well has been found to increase the probability that a citizen turns out to vote (Larcinese, 2007).

Second, socio-demographic variables also have their effects. Education is strongly correlated with turnout, but the strength of the relation varies cross-nationally (Gallego, 2010). Age is a widely known strong predictor for voting (Blais, Gidengil, & Nevitte, 2004; Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980). The more a citizen is old, the more a citizen is likely to vote. The relation is not linear, however, because turnout tends to decrease during the last years of life mainly due to physical restrictions (Blais, Gidengil, & Nevitte, 2004). Recent studies have also suggested that the relation would look like a roller-coaster (Bhatti & Hansen, 2012) because 1st-time voters would vote in a greater proportion than 2nd- and 3rd-time voters. Brady, Verba and Schlozman (1995) have shown that civic skills are required to participate in the public sphere and these are also developed in places of religious worship. Indeed, religious attendance is positively correlated

with turnout and political participation (Blais, Gidengil, Nevitte, & Nadeau, 2004; Cassel, 1999; Fowler & Dawes, 2008).

Third, investigating the impact of indifference and alienation comparatively means that we must take into account some institutional variables that are regularly linked to turnout. The electoral system influences citizens' decision to cast a ballot, either positively or negatively. Systems with proportionality rules (PR) are known to have a higher turnout (Blais & Dobrzynska, 1998), but it does not come without consequences. Proportionality rules also are associated with the presence of a greater number of parties than in non-PR systems. *"Because they are offered more choice, fewer citizens should feel indifferent or alienated from the party system"* (Blais & Aarts, 2006 : 183). Yet, as recognized early by Jackman (1987), more parties can also create uncertainty toward the election result because of the coalition formation. Electoral systems organize how votes are translated into seats and may create distortions. The relation between disproportionality and turnout itself is not straightforward either. As reported by Blais and Aarts (2006), cross-national studies report a strong negative impact on turnout while others find no significant effect. The largest sample of elections studied (Blais & Dobrzynska, 1998) provides indications of a small significant effect for disproportionality. Finally, compulsory voting has been one of the most consistent predictors for turnout, even when it is not strictly enforced (Geys, 2006; Quintelier, Hooghe & Marien, 2011).

5. Data and Method

5.1. Data

To assess the transportability of indifference and alienation in terms of measures as well as concepts, a cross-national sample is needed. For this study, we thus use the third module of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems. For the estimations, we included only countries for which the Freedom House ratings indicate that the countries could be considered *free* (below 3) during the year the election was held. We have thus excluded Belarus, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Thailand and Turkey. Furthermore, the data from the USA have also been excluded because there was no variation on the dependent variable after the exclusion of discrete respondents. This leaves us with 29 countries totalizing 29,373 respondents.

5.2. Dependent variable: turnout

We perform a cross-national analysis of turnout employing individual-level survey data. Doing so, we have to be aware of the fact that due to a social desirability bias, turnout is generally overreported in post-electoral surveys. Validation studies have furthermore shown that biases are not randomly distributed, but that some citizens are more likely to overreport participation than others (Ansolabehere & Hersh, 2012; Karp & Brockington, 2005). Additionally, the extent to which turnout is overreported varies systematically across countries and elections as well, with especially voters in high turnout settings being vulnerable to over reporting (Karp & Brockington, 2005; Selb & Munzert, 2013).[1] As clear from Table 1, the average reported turnout in our sample is 82%, which notably includes countries with compulsory voting (Australia 2007 and Greece 2009). Participation varies from 95% in Australia in 2007 to 52% in Poland in 2005.

Table 1. Reported turnout by elections (from the lowest to the highest)

Elections	Turnout (%)	Elections	Turnout (%)
Poland 2005	52.28	Austria 2008	85.95
South Korea 2008	64.72	Mexico 2006	86.48
Switzerland 2007	68.52	Ireland 2007	88.50
Poland 2007	71.03	Greece 2009	88.52
Czech Republic 2010	71.21	France 2007	89.85
Czech Republic 2006	73.90	Sweden 2006	90.37
Portugal 2009	76.06	Netherlands 2010	91.31
Mexico 2009	77.11	Iceland 2007	91.47
Slovakia 2010	78.18	Romania 2009	91.64
Germany 2009	79.39	Iceland 2009	92.48
Latvia 2010	79.50	Netherlands 2006	93.09
Israel 2006	80.89	New Zealand 2008	93.30
South Africa 2008	81.08	Germany 2005	93.61
Croatia 2007	81.51	Australia 2007	94.18
Japan 2007	85.14	**Mean**	**82.46**

5.3. Measures of alienation and indifference

As stated before, we operationalize alienation and indifference by means of party evaluation scores. We focus on alienation first. Brody and Page (1973: 4) stated *"If a respondent feels*

[1].Multilevel modeling does not allow us yet to properly weight our dependent variable because of the required scaling on each level (Chantala, Blanchette, & Suchindran, 2011) when using a binary dependent variable (e.g., use of logistic regression).

highly negative about even his most favored candidate – that is, if there is no candidate whom he particularly likes – it is reasonable to call him 'alienated'". Staying close to this conceptualization, a good measure of alienation is a respondent's maximum party evaluation. The lower that value is, the more alienated we can consider a voter to be. In order to have an indicator in which higher values reflect more alienation, we therefore subtract the maximum party evaluation a respondent gives from the maximum value that can be reported.

$$A = Max - P_{max}$$

Where A is the measure of alienation, Max is the maximum value that can be reported and P_{max} is the highest evaluation score a respondent gives to any of the parties

Second, we employ a number of different operationalizations of indifference. We have hypothesized that in multiparty contexts it is more fruitful to take all parties into account than to only focus on the two top-ranked or the most and the least preferred parties only. In order to test this hypothesis, we make use of three different measures of indifference. In a first measure, we take the difference of the evaluation for the most and the least preferred party and subtract this from the maximum value that can be reported. As such, higher values indicate more indifference.

$$I_{max\text{-}min} = Max - (P_{max} - P_{min})$$

Where $I_{max\text{-}min}$ is the measure of indifference, Max is the maximum value that can be reported, P_{max} is the highest evaluation score a respondent gives to any of the parties and P_{min} is the lowest evaluation score a respondent gives to any of the parties.

A second measure is based on the difference of the evaluation of the first and second most preferred party.

$$I_{1st\text{-}2nd} = Max\text{-}(P_{1st} - P_{2nd})$$

Where $I_{1st\text{-}2nd}$ is the measure of indifference, Max is the maximum value that can be reported, P_{1st} is the highest evaluation score a respondent gives to any of the parties and P_{2nd} is the 2^{nd} highest evaluation score a respondent gives to any of the parties.

A third measure, finally, is based on the mean difference between the maximum evaluation and how any other party is evaluated.

$$I_{mean} = Max - \left(\frac{1}{n-1} \sum_{i=1}^{n} (P_{max} - P_i) \right)$$

Where I_{mean} is the measure of indifference, Max is the maximum value that can be reported, P_{max} is the highest evaluation score a respondent gives to any of the parties and P_i is any other party evaluation score.

To clarify the construction of the three indifference measures, look at the preferences of Ann and Ben in Figure 1 and of Carol and David in Figure 2 as presented in Table 1. The metric implies that higher values indicate more indifference. Additionally, before including the measures in our analyses, the indicators of indifference and alienation were standardized to run from 0 to 1. Doing so, we assure comparability of different measures.

Table 2. Comparing measures of indifference for hypothetical voters

	$I_{max-min}$	$I_{1st-2nd}$	I_{mean}
Ann	10-(10-1) = 1	10-(10-1) = 1	10-((9+9+9+9)/4) = 1
Ben	10-(10-1) = 1	10-(10-8) = 8	10-((2+2+2+9)/4) = 6.25
Carol	10-(9-2) = 3	10-(9-9) = 10	10-((0+7+7+7)/4) = 4.75
David	10-(9-8) = 9	10-(9-9) = 10	10-((0+1+1+1)/4)=9.25

Building on the literature on turnout, we control for a large set of independent variables that have regularly been found to affect citizens' probability to turn out to vote. Age is included as a continuous variable. Furthermore, we add age-squared in order to assess the curvilinear relation found in previous studies. Gender is also controlled for as an antecedent variable and female respondents are coded 1. Education has four categories: no or only a primary education, secondary education, college education and university education and higher. The CSES-surveys included three political knowledge questions adapted to each country. The variable is coded from 0 (no right answers) to 3 (all answers right). Additionally, we control for country-level variables as well. We follow the suggestion from Blais and Aarts (2006) to not include dummies for party systems, but rather to include measures for the effective number of electoral parties (ENEP) and disproportionality from the previous election. *"Disproportionality can be conceptualized as a summary measure that takes into account both the electoral formula and district magnitude"* (Blais & Aarts, 2006 : 188). Taking these rates at time *t* would be faulty because voters resent the effects of these two measures only after the elections result are out, which is, as we know all,

after they decided to cast a ballot. These two indices have been retrieved from Michael Gallagher's *Election Indices Dataset*. A dummy variable for compulsory voting is also added. Descriptive for all independent variables are listed in Table 3.

Table 3. Descriptive independent variables

Variables	Min	Max	Mean	Standard deviation	N
Indifference (Max-Min)	0	1	0.363	0.275	29,373
Indifference (1st-2nd)	0	1	0.814	0.200	29,373
Indifference (Mean)	0	1	0.564	0.216	29,373
Alienation	0	1	0.218	0.202	29,373
Age	16	106	47.349	17.308	29,373
Age-squared	256	11236	2541.426	1718.828	29,373
Gender	0	1	0.526	0.499	29,373
Education	1	4	2.388	0.989	29,373
Religious attendance	0	1	0.429	0.367	29,373
Political knowledge	0	3	1.616	1.001	29,373
Effective number of electoral parties	1.97	10.62	4.853	1.663	29
Disproportionality	0.26	21.95	5.332	4.296	29
Compulsory voting	0	1	0.152	0.359	29

5.4. Method

The CSES-data have a nested structure, with individual respondents nested in countries. This structure makes it possible to approach the data in a hierarchical multilevel way. Moreover, this allows to not only look at the individual level indicators of turnout, but also at how differences in the electoral context affect whether or not a respondent turns out to vote. The appropriate analysis method is therefore multilevel regression analysis (Gelman & Hill, 2007). The binary nature of the dependent variable furthermore necessitates the use of logistic regression analysis, which is why we present the results of multilevel logistic regressions.

Besides assessing the impact of indifference and alienation on the pooled data, however, we also present the results of country-by-country regressions. These election-specific regressions allow us to assess whether the explanatory power of different measures of indifference varies as the number of parties in an electoral context increases.

6. Results

Theoretically, we know that indifference and alienation are different concepts, but are they also independent once they have been operationalized? As a first step, we tested to what extent each of the indicators of indifference correlates with alienation. Correlations between each of the three indifference measures and alienation are positive. As indifference increases, alienation increases as well. The correlation coefficient for the $I_{max-min}$ measure is 0.724, it is 0.394 for the $I_{1st-2nd}$ measure and 0.704 for the comprehensive measure. All three correlations are significant at the 0.001 level. The strength of the correlation for the $I_{1st-2nd}$ measure is moderate, while the two others are strong correlations. Given these high correlations, we verified collinearity with the tolerance tests for each indifference measures and alienation in the regression analyses. VIF statistics vary from 1.19 to 2.16 and were therefore all within acceptable limits. We can thus be confident of the independence of our measures of indifference on the one hand and alienation on the other. It still has to be noted, however, that voters who do not have a strong preference for one specific party, are also more likely to be alienated from the entire political system.

As a first step, we investigate whether – as we hypothesized – alienation and indifference are indeed significantly decreasing the probability that a citizen will turn out to vote. We do so by means of multilevel regression models in which we control for individual-level and for country-level factors. We estimate three different models with each time another measure of indifference included. For reasons of space, we only present the full models here, but as clear from the tables in appendix, there are no substantial differences for the effects of indifference and alienation in the more parsimonious models.

Estimating a null-model indicates an intraclass correlation coefficient of 0.182. With 18% of the variation between elections, taking into account contextual differences is therefore quite important. Table 4 reports the results for the full models with each of the three measures of indifference.

First, we look at the effects of the three measures of indifference. As is clear from the results in Table 4, both the $I_{max-min}$ as well as the I_{mean} measure are significantly related to turnout. The effects are in expected directions and indicate that the more indifferent a citizen is, the less likely s/he is to turn out to vote. Unlike what holds for these two measures of indifference, the measure

based on the difference between the most and the second most liked party is not significantly related to turnout. As the other measures are significantly related to turnout, it seems that this measure is not well-suited to capture citizens' feelings of indifference towards the parties at offer. The non-significant relationship would suggest that the validity of this indifference measure is to be questioned. Melton (2013: 15) had also previously suggested that this measure lacks of face validity and has weak criterion validity, which could explain why the effect is not strong and not significant. This represents also an argument advocating for the use of evaluations of all parties in the system instead of two. Despite the fact that this measure is not found to have a significant impact on the probability that a citizen turns out to vote, the fact that the other two measures indicate strong and significant effects provides suggestive evidence for our first hypothesis. This also suggests that results from a two-party system cannot just be used to evaluate multiparty systems. While in a two-party system the distance between the first and the second (and therefore also the last) party is obviously very important, this measurement is not necessarily relevant in a multi-party systems where a multitude of political parties are at offer.

The results furthermore indicate a strong and significant impact of alienation on turnout. Higher levels of alienation from the party system are associated with a significantly lower probability to turn out to vote. Additionally and quite importantly, since we standardized the measures indifference and alienation to all run from 0 to 1 we can directly compare their impact from looking at the coefficients. Doing so indicates that alienation has a more profound impact on the probability that a citizen turns out to vote than indifference has. The results in Table 4 lead us to safely conclude that we can accept our second hypothesis; a higher level of alienation indeed significantly decreases the probability that one will turn out to vote. Furthermore, and in line with previous research, we can conclude that the effect of alienation is stronger than the effect of indifference.

Looking at the individual-level control variables, then, we can observe that a respondent's gender does not significantly affect the probability to turn out. Age, age squared, educational levels, religious attendance and political knowledge are all significant and their direction is in line with what the literature suggests. Somewhat surprisingly, and even though the null-model indicated that 18% of the variance is to be found at the election-level, none of the contextual-level indicators seems to be significantly related to turnout. The differences we find between elections

thus obviously have other determinants, like e.g., the closeness of the elections, or the election campaign.

Table 4. Multilevel regression with reported turnout as dependent variable

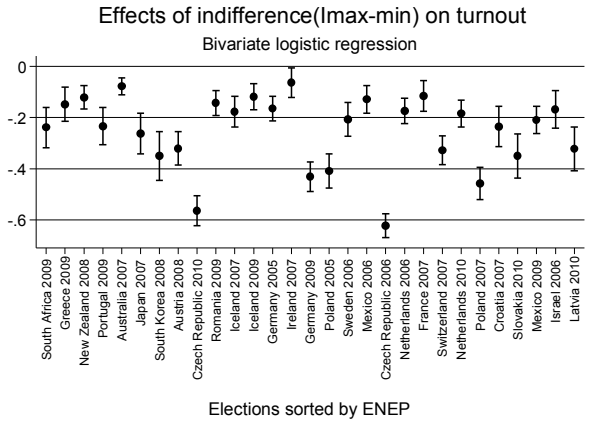
	Model I Max-Min	**Model II** 1st-2nd	**Model III** Curtosis
	b (s.e.)	b (s.e.)	b (s.e.)
Intercept	-0.061	-0.699	-0.042
	(0.634)	(0.642)	(0.642)
Independent variables			
Indifference	-0.704***	-0.055	-0.428**
	(0.108)	(0.107)	(0.123)
Alienation	-2.132***	-2.795***	-2.510***
	(0.134)	(0.093)	(0.120)
Individual-level controls			
Age	-0.074***	-0.074***	-0.074***
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Age^2	-0.000***	-0.000***	-0.000***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Female	-0.076	-0.078	-0.077
	(0.036)	(0.036)	(0.037)
Education	0.257***	0.262***	0.262***
	(0.022)	(0.023)	(0.022)
Religious attendance	0.614***	0.606***	0.612***
	(0.061)	(0.062)	(0.061)
Political knowledge	0.333***	0.341***	0.339***
	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.019)
Country-years-level controls			
Effective Number Parties	-0.069	-0.063	-0.062
	(0.127)	0.128	(0.128)
Disproportionality	-0.047	-0.047	-0.047
	(0.035)	(0.035)	(0.035)
Compulsory voting	0.795	0.773	0.784
	(0.647)	(0.651)	(0.654)
ICC	0.173	0.175	0.176
Log likelihood	-10,363.319	-10,383.742	-10,377.812

Source : CSES - Module 3.

Notes: Numbers in parentheses are the standard errors. *p<0.05 **p<0.01 ***p<0.001

The results of the multilevel analyses on the pooled data indicate that both indifference and alienation decrease the likelihood that one turns out to vote. Additionally, it is clear that alienation has a much stronger effect than indifference has. As a second step, we aim to shed light on the question whether measures of indifference that take all parties into account are better predictors of turnout as there are more parties in a system. To this end, we look at bivariate relationships between each of the measures of indifference and turnout. Countries are sorted by the effective number of electoral parties (ENEP). We show the marginal effects of bivariate logistic regressions and the 95% confidence interval. Marginal effects are easier to interpret than coefficients and inform us on the significance of the relationship. In Figure 3, we see the effects of the $I_{max-min}$ measure. All effects are negative and significant at the 0.001 level. Turnout in many Eastern European countries is more affected by indifference than in other countries decreasing the probability the vote without about 60 percentage points. On the opposite side, turnout in France, Australia and Ireland is less affected by indifference because the probability to vote decreases of only 10 percentage points. It is interesting to see that indifference still has a significant effect on turnout even in Australia and in Greece in 2009 where voting is compulsory, but not strictly enforced.

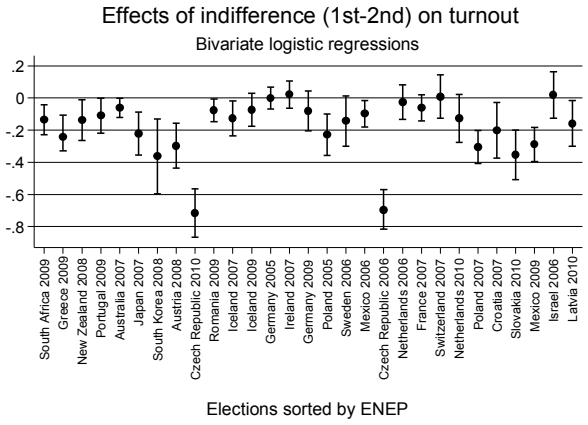
Figure 3 – Effects of indifference ($I_{max-min}$) on turnout



In Figure 4, we see the effects on turnout of the $I_{1st-2nd}$ indifference measure. Generally, the effects are less strong if we compare with the other indifference measures, but many relationships are not significant. Effects at the 0.001 significance level are only found in 8 elections: Greece, Japan, Korea, Austria, Czech Republic (2010), Poland (2005 and 2007), Slovakia and Mexico

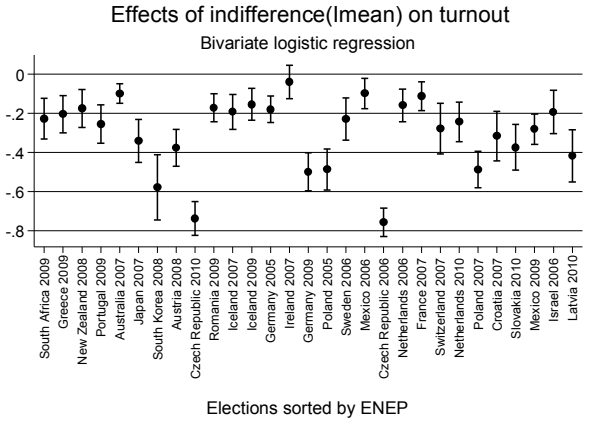
(2009). These are also the elections where the effects are the strongest in this figure, but not as strong as in the other figures. We can thus only rely on the effects found in these countries. However, the Czech elections are again the most affected by indifference because it decreases the probability to vote with 70 percentage points, while the other significant elections' effects vary between 40 and 30 percentage points. The few significant relationships further confirm what the multilevel analyses already pointed out; the $I_{1st\text{-}2nd}$ measure of indifference does not seem to capture indifference well. The marginal effects presented in Figure 4 indicate that this holds for almost every election in the sample. Regardless of contextual differences, therefore, it seems as if this measure is not a valid indicator of the concept of indifference.

Figure 4. Effects of indifference($I_{1st\text{-}2nd}$) on turnout



In Figure 5, we present the effects of the I_{mean} indifference measure. Effects on turnout are all negative and significant at the 0.001 level except for Mexico in 2006. The two Czech elections are once again where indifference has the strongest effect on turnout. Compared to Figure 3, the effect is even stronger, decreasing the probability to vote with almost 80 percentage points. Again, we find many East-European countries where turnout is strongly affected by indifference, along with South Korea and Japan.

Figure 5. Effects of indifference(I_{mean}) on turnout



The election-by-election analyses presented above indicate that there is substantial variation between countries in the extent to which indifference affects the probability of turnout. We have hypothesized that as the number of parties in a system increases, a measure of indifference taking into account multiple parties would better predict turnout. Even though elections are sorted by the number of parties in Figures 3 to 5, it is impossible to see a clear trend in explanatory power as the number of parties increases. To test this hypothesis, we look at two indicators of goodness of fit and the extent to which these are related to the number of parties in a system; the Cragg-Uhler Nagelkerke R^2 and the percentage of correct predictions.

According to our hypothesis, we expect to find a positive correlation between the number of parties in a system and the pseudo-R^2 and a positive correlation between the number of parties and the number of correct predictions. Additionally, our hypothesis specifies that we expect this to hold for measures of indifference taking into account all parties at offer. Translating this to our three measures of indifference, we do not expect to find a significant correlation for the $I_{1st\text{-}2nd}$ measure, as this measure only takes into account the two most preferred parties. We could expect to find a significant correlation for the $I_{max\text{-}min}$ measure, since by its focus on the extremes, this measure does indirectly take all parties into account. The strongest correlation is expected for the

I_{mean} measure of indifference, because this index explicitly takes all variation in party evaluations into account.

Table 5 presents the results of these tests and shows that none of the correlations are significant. We hence cannot interpret the correlation coefficients. As a consequence, we are unable to confirm our third hypothesis. The effective number of electoral parties is not related to how much change in turnout we can explain with indifference, nor it is related with the percentage of correct predictions made by using indifference as a predictor of turnout. We did predict correctly that $I_{1st-2nd}$ would not give us significant relations. However, because no correlations are significant, $I_{max-min}$ and I_{mean} are most probably equally good measures in predicting turnout.

Table 5. Correlations between ENEP and R^2 and ENEP and the percentage of correct predictions

	Correlation ENEP-pseudo-R^2	Correlation ENEP-% correct predictions
$I_{max-min}$	-0.033	-0.180
	(0.864)	(0.350)
$I_{1st-2nd}$	-0.056	-0.140
	(0.774)	(0.470)
I_{mean}	-0.058	-0.157
	(0.766)	(0.417)

Source : CSES - Module 3

Notes: The p-values are in parentheses below the correlation coefficients.

The main interesting finding is that the effects of both indifference measures taking all parties into account, directly or indirectly, are not influenced by the number of parties in the system. If we refer to Table 4 a last time, we see that the coefficient for $I_{max-min}$ is of -0.704 while it takes only two party evaluations into account so this measure probably overestimates the effect of indifference. The coefficient for I_{mean}, which is taking all parties into account, is -0.428, meaning that less variation is lost in the calculations of indifference. The true effect of indifference on turnout, most likely, is somewhere in-between.

7. Conclusion

In this paper, we build further on previous research showing that indifference and alienation decrease turnout. Our aim was to shed light on the question whether indifference and alienation

explain turnout in other contexts than the United States. To this end, we have focused on the extent to which these concepts are geographically transportable and how indifference should be operationalized to give insights on turnout in multiparty contexts.

The CSES dataset has provided us a cross-national comparative basis to verify if indifference and alienation were transportable concepts. Our results show that –as hypothesized– indifference and alienation do significantly decrease the probability that a voter casts a ballot. Clearly, the choice set matters and even has a profound effect on whether or not one turns out to vote on Election Day. A voter who is not sure what party she likes most has a smaller probability of turning out to vote. If parties want to fight decreasing turnout, therefore, it is essential that they stress in what aspects they differ from the other parties. Having a varied set of options to choose from, will also enhance the possibilities of voters to distinguish between them which will in turn increase turnout. Alienation, however, has an even stronger impact on turnout. While indifference among the electorate certainly is a source of low turnout, a more important problem therefore is the electorate's rejection of all parties. Voters who do not like a single one of the parties are very unlikely to cast a ballot.

We have claimed that for investigating indifference and alienation cross-nationally, we have to rely on measures of party evaluations. We furthermore expected that in multiparty systems it is essential to take multiple parties into account if one wants to investigate how indifference explains turnout. Contrary to our expectations, however, taking into account voters' attitudes vis-à-vis all parties in a system is not a better predictor of turnout than an indicator that only takes into consideration the most and the least preferred party. Importantly, however, measures of indifference that disregard most of the variation in party evaluations by only focusing on the most and the second most preferred party are not the option scholars should take. Such a measure is not significantly related to the probability that a citizen turns out to vote, which leads us to question the validity of this operationalization of indifference.

Looking at differences between countries, unexpectedly, we find that the strongest effect of indifference in turnout takes place in many East-European countries, along with South Korea and Japan. Future research should insist on studying these countries in details in order to see which political characteristics are shared (or different) and if these factors could become important explanations to the causes of indifference and alienation. Additionally, while there is a renewed

interested for the effect of indifference and alienation, we know little about who are these indifferent and alienated voters. Individual characteristics like education and political interested could be at play. Institutional and contextual characteristics could also influence the degree to which someone is indifferent such as the ideological parties' coverage, parties' behavior and strategies (Ceka, 2012) or even issues that are at stake (or not) during a campaign. We can also assume that the process behind indifference does not happen overnight. In fact, our knowledge is poor on how indifference develops in a timely manner. However, because indifference and alienation are strongly correlated to one another, it is possible that indifference could be a prior stage of alienation. Panel data would be needed to verify if an increase in indifference through time evolves to alienation after a certain period.

References

Aarts, K., & Wessels, B. (2005). Electoral Turnout. In J. Thomassen (Ed.) *The European Voter.: A Comparative Study of Modern Democracies* (pp. 64–83). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Adams, J., Dow, J., & Merrill, S. (2006). The Political Consequences of Alienation-based and Indifference-based Voter Abstention: Applications to Presidential Elections. *Political Behavior*, *28*(1), 65–86.

Ansolabehere, S., & Hersh, E. (2012). Validation: What Big Data Reveal About Survey Misreporting and the Real Electorate. *Political Analysis*, *20*(4), 437–459.

Bertoa, F. C. (2014). Party Systems and Cleavage Structures Revisited: A Sociological Explanation of Party System Institutionalization in East Central Europe. *Party Politics*, *20*(1), 16–36.

Bhatti, Y., & Hansen, K. M. (2012). The Effect of Generation and Age on Turnout to the European Parliament - How Turnout Will Continue to Decline in the Future. *Electoral Studies*, *31*(2), 262–272.

Blais, A. (2000). *To Vote or Not To Vote?: The Merits and Limits of Rational Choice Theory*. Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press.

Blais, A., & Aarts, K. (2006). Electoral Systems and Turnout. *Acta Politica*, *41*(2), 180–196.

Blais, A., & Dobrzynska, A. (1998). Turnout in Electoral Democracies. *European Journal of Political Research*, *33*(1981), 239–261.

Blais, A., Gidengil, E., & Nevitte, N. (2004). Where Does Turnout Decline Come From? *European Journal of Political Research*, *43*, 221–236.

Brady, H., Verba, S., & Schlozman, K. L. (1995). Beyond Ses : A Resource Model of Political Participation. *American Political Science Review*, *89*(2), 271–294.

Brody, R. A., & Page, B. I. (1973). Indifference, Alienation and Rational Decisions: The Effects of Candidate Evaluations on Turnout and the Vote. *Public Choice*, *15*(1), 1–17.

Callander, S., & Wilson, C. H. (2007). Turnout, Polarization, and Duverger's Law. *The Journal of Politics*, *69*(4), 1047–1056.

Campbell, A., Converse, P., Miller, W., & Stokes, D. (1960). *The American Voter*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Cassel, C. A. Voluntary Associations, Churches, and Social Participation Theories of Turnout. *Social Science Quarterly*, *80*(3), 504–517.

Ceka, B. (2012). The Perils of Political Competition: Explaining Participation and Trust in Political Parties in Eastern Europe. *Comparative Political Studies*, *46*(12), 1610–1635.

Chantala, K., Blanchette, D., & Suchindran, C. M. (2011). *Software to Compute Samplings Weights for Multilevel Analysis*. Carolina Population Center, UNC. Retrieved May 08, 2014, from http://www.cpc.unc.edu/research/tools/data_analysis/ml_sampling_weights/ComputeWeights for Multilevel Analysis.pdf

Dalton, R. J. (2007). Partisan Mobilization, Cognitive Mobilization, and the Changing American Electorate. *Electoral Studies*, *26*(2), 274–286.

Downs, A. (1957). *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. New York: Harper and Row.

Fowler, J. H., & Dawes, C. T. (2008). Two Genes Predict Voter Turnout. *The Journal of Politics*, *70*(03), 579–594.

Franklin, M., Mackie, T., & Valen, H. (2009). *Electoral Change. Responses to Evolving Social and Attitudinal Structures in Western Countries*. Colchester: ECPR Press.

Franklin, M. N. (2004). *Voter Turnout and the Dynamics of Electoral Competition in Established Democracies since 1945*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gallego, A. (2010). Understanding Unequal Turnout: Education and Voting in Comparative Perspective. *Electoral Studies*, *29*(2), 239–248.

Gelman, A., & Hill, J. (2007). *Data Analysis Using Regression and Multilevel/Hierarchical Models*. *Policy Analysis*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Geys, B. (2006). Explaining Voter Turnout: A Review of Aggregate-Level Research. *Electoral Studies*, *25*(4), 637–663.

Jackman, R. W. (1987).Institutions and Voter Turnout in the Industrial Democracies. *American Political Science Review*, *81*(2), 405–424.

Johnston, R., Matthews, J. S., & Bittner, A. (2007). Turnout and the Party System in Canada, 1988-2004. *Electoral Studies*, *26*(4), 735–745.

Karp, J. A., & Brockington, D. (2005). Social Desirability and Response Validity : A Comparative Analysis of Overreporting Voter Turnout in Five Countries. *The Journal of Politics*, *67*(3), 825–840.

Kriesi, H. (2010). Restructuration of Partisan Politics and the Emergence of a New Cleavage Based on Values. *West European Politics*, *33*(3), 673–685.

Kriesi, H., Grande, E., Lachat, R., Dolezal, M., Bornschier, S., & Frey, T. (2006). Globalization and the Transformation of the National Political Space: Six European Countries Compared. *European Journal of Political Research*, *45*(6), 921–956.

Kroh, M., van der Brug, W., & van der Eijk, C. (2007). Prospects for Electoral Change. In W. van der Brug & C. van der Eijk (Eds.), *European Elections and Domestic Politics: Lessons from the Past and Scenarios for the Future* (pp. 209–225). Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.

Larcinese, V. (2007). Does Political Knowledge Increase Turnout? Evidence from the 1997 British General Election. *Public Choice*, *131*(3-4), 387–411.

Leighley, J., & Nagler, J. (2012). *Who Votes Now? Demographics, Issues, Inequality and Turnout in the United States*. Oxford: Princeton University Press.

Melton, J. (2013). *Measuring Indifference: A Validity Test of Several Commonly Used Measures*. Retrieved May 8th 2014 from http://www.ucl.ac.uk/~uctqjm0/Files/melton_measuringindifference.pdf

Miller, W. E., & Shanks, M. J. (1996). *The New American voter*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Plane, D. L., & Gershtenson, J. (2004). Candidates' Ideological Locations, Abstention, and Turnout in U.S. Midterm Senate Elections. *Political Behavior*, *26*(1), 69–93.

Quintellier, E., Hooghe M. & Marien, S. (2011). The Effect of Compulsory Voting on Turnout Stratification Patterns. A Cross-National Analysis. *International Political Science Review*, *32(4*), 396-416.

Selb, P., & Munzert, S. (2013). Voter Overrepresentation, Vote Misreporting, and Turnout Bias in Postelection Surveys. *Electoral Studies*, *32*(1), 186–196.

Thurner, P. W., & Eymann, A. (2000). Policy-specific Alienation and Indifference in the Calculus of Voting: A Simultaneous Model of Party Choice and Abstention. *Public Choice*, *102*(1), 51–77.

Wolfinger, R. E., & Rosenstone, S. J. (1980). *Who Votes?* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Yoo, S. (2010). Two Types of Neutrality: Ambivalence versus Indifference and Political Participation. *The Journal of Politics*, *72*(01), 163.

Zipp, J. F. (1985). Perceived Representativeness and Voting: An Assessment of the Impact of "Choices" vs. "Echoes." *American Political Science Review*, *79*(1), 50–61.

Appendix

TABLE 2
Multilevel regression with turnout as dependent variable - Measure of Indifference: MaxMin

	Null model	Model A	Model B	Model C
	Coefficients	Coefficients	Coefficients	Coefficients
Intercept	2.025***	2.896	-0.567**	-0.061
	(0.159)	(0.162)	(0.213)	(0.634)
Independent variables				
Indifference (MaxMin)		-1.001***	-0.703***	-0.704***
		(0.105)	(0.109)	(0.108)
Alienation		-1.965***	-2.135***	-2.132***
		(0.129)	(0.134)	(0.134)
Individual-level controls				
Age			0.074***	-0.074***
			(0.006)	(0.005)
Age^2			-0.000***	-0.000***
			(0.000)	(0.000)
Gender			-0.076	-0.076
			(0.036)	(0.036)
Education			0.257***	0.257***
			(0.022)	(0.022)
Religious attendance			0.615***	0.614***
			(0.061)	(0.061)
Political knowledge			0.333***	0.333***
			(0.019)	(0.019)
Country-years-level controls				
ENEP				-0.069
				(0.127)
Disproportionality				-0.047
				(0.035)
Compulsory voting				0.795
				(0.647)
ICC	0.180	0.179	0.192	0.173

Source : CSES - Module 3

Notes: Numbers in parentheses are the standard errors. *p<0.05 **p<0.01 ***p<0.001

TABLE 3
Multilevel regression with turnout as dependent variable - Measure of Indifference: 1st-2nd

	Null model	Model A	Model B	Model C
	Coefficients	Coefficients	Coefficients	Coefficients
Intercept	2.025***	2.776***	-0.671**	-0.699
	(0.159)	(0.178)	(0.226)	(0.642)
Independent variables				
Indifference (1st-2nd)		-0.037	-0.559	-0,055
		(0.105)	(0.106)	(0.107)
Alienation		-2.924***	-2.796***	-2.795***
		(0.090)	(0.093)	(0.093)
Individual-level controls				
Age			0.074***	-0.074***
			(0.005)	(0.005)
Age^2			-0.000***	-0.000***
			(0.000)	(0.000)
Gender			-0.079	-0.078
			(0.036)	(0.036)
Education			0.262***	0.262***
			(0.023)	(0.023)
Religious attendance			0.606***	0.606***
			(0.061)	(0.062)
Political knowledge			0.341***	0.341***
			(0.019)	(0.019)
Country-years-level controls				
ENEP				-0.063
				(0.128)
Disproportionality				-0.047
				(0.035)
Compulsory voting				0.773
				(0.651)
ICC	0.180	0.180	0.193	0.175

Source : CSES - Module 3

Notes: Numbers in parentheses are the standard errors. *p<0.05 **p<0.01 ***p<0.001

TABLE 4
Multilevel regression with turnout as dependent variable - Measure of Indifference: Mean Difference

	Null model	Model 3.A	Model 3.B	Model 3.C
	Coefficients	Coefficients	Coefficients	Coefficients
Intercept	2.025***	3.020***	-0.518*	-0.042
	(0.159)	(0.171)	(0.220)	(0.642)
Independent variables				
Indifference (MeanDiff)		-0.652***	-0.428**	-0.428**
		(0.124)	(0.123)	(0.123)
Alienation		-2.476***	-2.512***	-2.51***
		(0.117)	(0.121)	(0.120)
Individual-level controls				
Age			0.074***	-0.074***
			(0.005)	(0.005)
Age^2			-0.000***	-0.000***
			(0.000)	(0.000)
Gender			-0.077	-0.077
			(0.037)	(0.037)
Education			0.262***	0.262***
			(0.022)	(0.022)
Religious attendance			0.612***	0.612***
			(0.061)	(0.061)
Political knowledge			0.339***	0.339***
			(0.019)	(0.019)
Country-years-level controls				
ENEP				-0.062
				(0.128)
Disproportionality				-0.047
				(0.035)
Compulsory voting				0.784
				(0.654)
ICC	0.180	0.183	0.194	0.176

Source : CSES - Module 3

Notes: Numbers in parentheses are the standard errors. *p<0.05 **p<0.01 ***p<0.001